

DE LA CEPEDE, 1788–1789 'HISTOIRE NATURELLE DES
SERPENS' AND LATER EDITIONS: PROPOSED REJECTION AS A
NON-BINOMINAL WORK. Z.N.(S.)1985

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Zoological Nomenclature*)

A. INTRODUCTION

In 1972 (*Bull. zool. Nom.* vol. 29, pp. 44–61, Dr L. D. Brongersma (*Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden*) analysed de la Cépède's *Histoire naturelle des Serpens*, 1788–1789 and later editions, in exhaustive detail. He put a number of alternative proposals to the Commission, as follows:

- I. To reject de la Cépède (henceforth in this paper, Lacépède), 1788–1789 and later editions as non-binominal, but to conserve *Crotalus piscivorus* Lacépède, 1788–1789, a name in general current use.
- II. If the proposal in I was unacceptable, to suppress a number of names in Lacépède's work, in the interests of stability of nomenclature.
- III. To rule that Bonnaterre, 1790, is the author of the generic name *Langaha*.
- IV, V. To take steps to conserve *Boa reticulata* Schneider, 1801.

2. In view of the complexity of the case presented by Dr Brongersma, and the mass of detail involved in it, the Secretary considered that the case should not be taken further in the absence of any comment on it. Eventually, in 1976, Professor Jay Savage (then of the *Allan Hancock Foundation, Los Angeles*) wrote to express interest; but it was not until 1980 that he submitted his comment. It was published in 1981, *Bull. zool. Nom.* vol. 38, pp. 8–9. Although he had previously considered Lacépède's work to be binominal, he now agreed with Dr Brongersma that it was not, and should be rejected. He disagreed with Dr Brongersma on a number of points of detail.

3. In 1984, as Dr Brongersma had not replied to Professor Savage, I asked Professor Dr Holthuis to re-examine the case and make recommendations. I am most grateful to him for the thorough investigation he has carried out and for the clarity of his recommendations. He came to the same broad conclusions as Dr Brongersma.

B. IS LACÉPÈDE, 1788–1789 TO BE ACCEPTED OR REJECTED?

4. The first question to be answered is, whether Lacépède's 1789 work and later editions is to be rejected as non-binominal, or accepted as an available work. If the work is rejected, then the generic name *Langaha* and the binomina *Coluber lanceolatus*, *Dromicus cursor* and *Crotalus piscivorus*

(all of the 1st edition, 1789) and *Langaha madag* (of the 2nd edition, 1790) are lost. However, the first three merely take 'Bonnaterre, 1790' as author and date, while the last becomes '*Langaha madagascariensis* Bonnaterre, 1790'. Plenary powers would have to be used to conserve *Crotalus piscivorus* Lacépède, 1789, a name in general current use.

5. If Lacépède's work is accepted as an available work, then *Coluber flavocaeruleus* Lacépède, 1788–1789 would replace *Boa reticulata* Schneider, 1801. *Coluber oularsawa* Bonnaterre, 1790, which would become the valid name for the species if Lacépède's work was rejected, and *Coluber oryzivorus* Suckow, 1798 are both unused senior synonyms of *Boa reticulata*, which must at all costs be conserved.

C. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF LACÉPÈDE, 1789 UNDER THE CODE?

6. I have examined Lacépède's 1788–1789 work thoroughly to determine its status under the Code. I do not see how even the most indulgent nomenclaturist could claim that it was available. Apart from being not consistently binominal, the book as a whole is not even consistently latinised. In the main body of the work the descriptions of the species are headed by vernacular names. When Latin names are cited within the text, it is clear that it is the vernacular name, not the Latin one, that is adopted as the valid name. The only place where names of a binominal type are to be found is in the Tableau Méthodique (readers should refer to Dr Brongersma's thorough analysis of the structure of the work).

7. The Tableau Méthodique contains many inconsistencies of nomenclature. As it is a detailed table of specific characters, the names in the left-hand column must be read as specific names. Whereas 86 species received binominal names, 52 received uninominal names, and a specific name is not available unless it is published in combination with a generic name (Article 11h(iii)). Among these uninominal names are a number of the form '17me de Gronovius, 17ma Gronovii', or '*septemdecimagronovii*' if spelt out and written as a single word. Such a name is not available under Article 11h(v). In the Nomenclature section, all the generic names that are adopted are vernacular except two — *Boa* and *Anguis* — but these are Linnean names, not new ones.

8. It is thus clear that only a ruling under the plenary powers would render Lacépède's *Histoire naturelle des Serpens*, 1788–1789 an available work. It is also clear that such an action is only theoretically an option for the Commission. The names that would thus acquire availability have never been used and, given their early date, would introduce instability and confusion on a massive scale. There seems little point in using plenary powers to declare a work available if those same powers have then to be used to suppress all but one of the new names in the work. Dr Brongersma has shown that the later editions do not differ in any material respect from the first, so that all can be rejected out of hand.

9. Dr Brongersma has also given exhaustive details of the usage of the names that should be protected, and this should be consulted.

D. PROPOSALS

10. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

- (1) to rule that Lacépède, 1788–1789, *Histoire naturelle des Serpens*, and its subsequent editions (1790, 1799, 1825, 1834, 1836) are unavailable works, and that no name acquires the status of availability by reason of having been published in any of them.
- (2) To use its plenary powers:
 - (a) to suppress, for the purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for those of the Principle of Homonymy:
 - (i) *oularsawa* Bonnaterre, 1790, as published in the binomen *Coluber oularsawa*;
 - (ii) *oryzivorus* Suckow, 1798, as published in the binomen *Coluber oryzivorus*;
 - (b) to rule that the specific name *piscivorus* Lacépède, 1788–1789, as published in the binomen *Crotalus piscivorus*, is an available name, notwithstanding that it was published in an unavailable work;
 - (c) to exempt the specific name *triangulum* Lacépède, 1788–1789, as published in the binomen *Coluber triangulum* (Official List of Specific Names in Zoology No. 2186) from the ruling requested in (1) above.
- (3) to place the generic name *Langaha* Bonnaterre, 1790 (gender: feminine), type species, by monotypy, *Langaha madagascariensis* Bonnaterre, 1790, on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology;
- (4) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *madagascariensis* Bonnaterre, 1790, as published in the binomen *Langaha madagascariensis* (specific name of the type species of *Langaha* Bonnaterre, 1790);
 - (b) *piscivorus* Lacépède, 1788–1789, as published in the binomen *Crotalus piscivorus*, and as conserved under the plenary powers in (2)(b) above;
 - (c) *reticulata* Schneider, 1801, as published in the binomen *Boa reticulata*, and as conserved under the plenary powers in (2)(a) above;
- (5) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *oularsawa* Bonnaterre, 1790, as published in the binomen *Coluber oularsawa*, and as suppressed under the plenary powers in (2)(a)(i) above;

- (b) *oryzivorus* Suckow, 1798, as published in the binomen *Coluber oryzivorus*, and as suppressed under the plenary powers in (2)(a)(ii) above;
- (6) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Works in Zoological Nomenclature, Lacépède, 1788–1789, *Histoire naturelle des Serpens* and its subsequent editions of 1790, 1799, 1825, 1834, 1836, ruled unavailable in (1) above, with an endorsement that no name acquires the status of availability by reason of having been published in any of them (except as specified in (2)(c) above).